

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, April 18, 2007

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
*Foster Care	2-3
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	4-9
Day Care	10
Domestic Violence	11-13
Heating Assistance	14-17
Food Assistance	18
Fraud	19
Appointments	20
News Release	21

*Important story at this spot

[Return to regular web page](#)



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April 18, 2007

Van Buren Township foster child's death a homicide

Medical examiner says boy died from head injury.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

The death of a 3-year-old boy who was living in a Van Buren Township foster home was ruled a homicide Tuesday, while family members blamed the state's child welfare system for failing to protect him.

"The system failed little James," said Rita King Bradley, mother of James Earl Bradley Jr. "It's just a tragedy that kids get put in the system and something terrible happens to them."

A head injury is listed as the cause of James' death, said Donna Tokarczyk, administrative coordinator of the Washtenaw County Office of the Medical Examiner. It is unclear how the injury happened but it was ruled a homicide.

No one has been charged yet.

James -- who loved to play with cars and was described by his mother as sweet and polite -- is the third child to have died in a licensed Michigan foster home in the past eight months. Isaac Lethbridge, 2, was beaten to death in a Detroit foster home in August. Allison Newman, 2, died in a Canton Township foster home in September, and her foster mother is awaiting trial on felony murder charges.

"Our state foster care system is under-resourced and very heavily taxed," said Sharon Claytor Peters, chief executive officer of Michigan's Children, an advocacy group. "We need to have more priority on our children."

James' foster parents called 911 on Easter after he was unresponsive in the upstairs master bedroom, said Van Buren Township Detective Bob Greene. He first was taken to Oakwood Annapolis Hospital in Wayne before he was flown to C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, where he died Friday.

State officials last week suspended the foster care license of Christine Woodward and Lasana Karva, who had received their license in November 2006, the same month that Bradley was placed in their home. The state also suspended the married couple's license to operate a family day care in their home. They could not be reached for comment.

James, along with his four sisters and three brothers, were removed from their home in January 2006 because of allegations that one of the children may have been sexually molested, said Greene.

The children were split up when they were placed in foster homes, Greene said.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Funeral for James

The public is invited to the funeral of 3-year-old James Earl Bradley Jr.

From 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. today, he will be at Caver Memorial Funeral Home, 19301 Van Dyke, in Detroit.

A funeral will be held at 11 a.m. Thursday at Zion Hope Missionary Baptist Church, 4800 Van Dyke Ave., in Detroit

[Return to regular web page](#)

Michigan Report

April 17, 2007

FOSTER CARE/HIGHER EDUCATION **SUMMIT PLANNED**

Experts in foster care and higher education from around the state will meet in Albion this week to discuss efforts to move more foster children into higher education.

A 2006 study by Wayne State University showed only 25 percent of children who age out of the foster care system go on to college or other education beyond high school, compared to 67 percent of all children in that age group. The summit will be exploring ideas, including a proposal for free tuition offered by the children themselves, for increasing that percentage.

Human Services Director Marianne Udow and Justice Maura Corrigan will open the summit Wednesday at Starr Commonwealth in Albion.



Mother is arrested in Canton

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

A Jackson County detective traveled to Canton on Monday to arrest a former Brooklyn woman in the 2003 suffocation of her 9-month-old daughter.

Crystal J. Poster was jailed pending arraignment on charges of open murder and first-degree child abuse.

"We believe the child was suffocated with a plastic bag," Prosecutor Hank Zavislak said of the death of McKenzie Zukowski on July 31, 2003.

Poster, 23, and McKenzie's father, Benjamin Zukowski, had divorced after less than a year of marriage.

Prosecutors came close to charging Poster more than two years ago, but backed off. Zavislak said the county's cold-case team took another look at the investigation.

"We were interviewing and re-interviewing potential witnesses up to two weeks ago, including a new witness we had not talked to," Zavislak said.

Detective Sgt. Lee Rose arrested Poster on a warrant for Crystal Richardson, her maiden name. She was booked under the name Poster. She was expected to be arraigned today.

Prosecutors admit the case is not a slam-dunk. The medical examiner initially listed the cause of death as asphyxiation. Dr. John Maino added "by plastic bag" after Poster told investigators in a second interview weeks later there was a garbage bag in the baby's crib when she found her blue and lifeless.

"If cold cases were easy they would have been solved immediately," Zavislak said.

He speculated Poster might have killed her child "for any one of two or three motives."

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Bond denied in baby's death

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

Citing "some new evidence," a magistrate Tuesday denied bond to a former Brooklyn woman accused of suffocating her baby girl in 2003.

Magistrate Fred Bishop arraigned Crystal J. Poster on charges of open murder and first-degree child abuse in the July 31, 2003, death of 9-month-old McKenzie Zukowski.

A sheriff's detective arrested Poster, 23, on Monday in Canton, where she moved two years ago and remarried.

"If she wanted to flee, she could have left at any time in the past four years," defense attorney Ivan Brown argued for a bond.

Poster was suspected soon after her daughter died. Prosecutors came close to charging her two years ago, then backed off until taking another run with the cold-case team this spring.

Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said Poster should be held without bond because of the murder charge. Suspects facing potential first-degree murder do not receive bonds in Jackson County.

District Judge Charles Falahee Jr. will conduct a preliminary hearing April 30.

Jackson County Medical Examiner Dr. John Maino initially ruled McKenzie died of asphyxiation.

Weeks later, after her mother told investigators there was a garbage bag in her crib, Maino amended the death certificate to asphyxiation by plastic bag.

Brown noted his client probably would not have been charged with murder if she had not volunteered the information.

Blumer said his office decided to file charges after the cold-case investigation team found a new witness this spring.

The witness offered information about the garbage bag, Blumer said.

Poster was married to Benjamin Zukowski less than a year when they split. He was scheduled to pick up McKenzie for his first court-ordered visitation on the day she died, Zukowski said.

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Jury leaves child abuse case undecided

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- A 24-year-old Hastings woman could be back in court next month -- again defending herself against accusations she put bleach in her baby's bottle -- after a jury Tuesday failed to reach a decision on a child abuse charge.

Barry County Circuit Judge James Fisher set a May 3 pretrial conference for Jennifer Clement after dismissing the jury Tuesday afternoon following four hours of deliberation.

The hung jury was released about 2:15 p.m., court officials said.

Clement was accused of poisoning her 8-month-old daughter with bleach in September, although she has suggested her 3-year-old son opened a bleach container and poured some in the baby's bottle.

The jury had three options for a possible conviction: first-degree child abuse, second-degree child abuse or a lesser offense of third-degree child abuse.

Court officials said the jury, which heard testimony Monday, returned before lunch Tuesday with the foreman saying they had reached a stalemate.

After the jury returned a second time in the afternoon, the judge decided to declare a hung jury.

The case will be set for another trial. Barry County Assistant Prosecutor David Banister declined to comment.

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www.record-eagle.com

04/18/2007

News in brief

TC man accused of beating, choking girl

FROM STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY — A Traverse City man faces multiple felony charges after he allegedly assaulted his 13-year-old daughter.

Robert Miles, 39, is charged with second-degree child abuse, felonious assault and other charges after police alleged he punched and choked his daughter until she lost consciousness at his home April 12, records show.

Miles was lodged in the Grand Traverse County jail Tuesday on 10 percent of a \$100,000 bond. Miles, who has several drug-related and violent crime convictions, is charged as a habitual offender.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Mom pleads no contest in 'sex contract' for daughter

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

By John S. Hausman

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A Muskegon Heights mother has unexpectedly pleaded no contest as charged to three sex counts, for allegedly arranging to have her boyfriend and her 15-year-old daughter be sex partners for two months while the woman recuperated from surgery.

The Chronicle is not identifying her to protect the daughter, who is a victim of sex abuse and not charged with any crime in the case. The daughter is now living with a court-approved guardian.

The woman Tuesday pleaded no contest to three counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct (aiding and abetting) with a person between the ages of 13 and 15. The Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office made no plea bargain, and Muskegon County Circuit Judge Timothy G. Hicks did not commit to any sentence cap in exchange for the plea.

Hicks scheduled sentencing for June 18.

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Detroit Free Press

Macomb County news briefs

April 18, 2007

UTICA: Hearing waived in child sex case

One of two Utica men charged with having sex with a 14-year-old girl at her mother's apartment waived his preliminary hearing Tuesday and his case was sent to Macomb County Circuit Court.

Christopher M. Garcia, 21, was bound over to circuit court after waiving the hearing in 41-A District Court in Shelby Township. The second man charged with having sex with the same girl, 21-year-old James Przeadzki, had his hearing adjourned.

Meanwhile, the girl's 35-year-old mother, who is charged with second-degree child abuse and contributing to the delinquency of a minor, also had her hearing adjourned. The Free Press is not naming the woman to protect the identity of her daughter, who is pregnant for the third time after two miscarriages and is living in foster care.

Garcia will be in circuit court on April 30. Przeadzki and the mother will be back in district court on the same day.

Utica police have said the two men began having sex with the girl nearly a year ago with her mother's knowledge.

Press & Argus

April 18, 2007

Woman pleads to unregistered day care

A Brighton woman known for being a government watchdog pleaded guilty last week to a misdemeanor charge of operating an unregistered day-care business.

Susan Lynn Walters-Steinacker faces up to 90 days in jail and a \$100 to \$1,000 fine when she is sentenced May 15 in Livingston County District Court.

Prosecutor David Morse said representatives with the state Department of Human Services referred the case to his office for charges after Walters-Steinacker, 52, failed to register her in-home day-care business as required by state law.

"DHS gave her the opportunity to either stop doing it or get a license and she did neither," Morse said Monday. "When she did neither they submitted it to us for prosecution."

Walters-Steinacker has said she has not cared for children at her home since the start of 2007.

Morse said his office has no evidence to suggest she is caring for children in her home today and that will be taken into consideration when she is sentenced.

However, that does not negate that Walters-Steinacker did break the law, Morse said, so his office continued to seek prosecution.

"The Legislature felt it was important enough to make it a crime," Morse explained. "I took an oath to enforce the law. ... DHS gave her an opportunity to comply and she didn't do it; and she admitted it because she pleaded guilty to it."

PRESS & GUIDE

Sexual assault awareness being stressed during April

FBI's most recent figures indicate 30 rapes reported in city in 2005

By Sean Delaney and Cristen Kis
, Press & Guide Newspapers

DEARBORN/DEARBORN HEIGHTS

Nationwide, a person is raped every two and a half minutes. To alert the public to startling statistics and the far-reaching impact of such crimes, April has been declared Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Sexual assault is defined as any kind of sexual activity that is unwanted, enacted by one person on another without consent. It may include the use of physical force — but many sexual assaults do not — and it involves some combination of coercion, threats and intimidation.

According to FBI crime statistics from 2005, the most recent available, there were 30 forcible rapes in Dearborn and 25 in Dearborn Heights.

One recent rape case in Dearborn involved a gun.

According to police reports, a woman told police she was on a date Jan. 27 when the 24-year-old man she was with raped her at gunpoint.

Police responded to the area of Linden and Walnut, just off of Oakwood and Southfield, and found the hysterical woman curled up on a front porch.

She was crying and repeatedly said, "I've been raped." Police were able to calm her down after about five minutes. She told them she was on a date with a man at his house where he allegedly offered her excessive alcohol.

The victim said the man forced her to his bedroom, pointed a rifle shotgun at her and made her "do things to him."

She escaped from the home and ran down the street trying to get help by banging on cars and front doors. She collapsed in the fetal position on the porch of neighbor who called police.

Although police reported the woman was distressed and crying, she was able to lead them to the man's house. Upon seeing the home, the woman curled into the fetal position and began sobbing again. She was taken to Oakwood Hospital for an exam.

At the time of the alleged rape, Dearborn Police Lt. Bill Leavens said Mohamad Rabih Ouza was arrested, but later released pending further investigation.

He was re-arrested and arraigned Feb. 7. Ouza waived his right to a preliminary exam and is facing first-degree charges of criminal sexual conduct. He will appear at 9 a.m. May 29 in Third Circuit Court.

"Cases become difficult (to prosecute) when you don't have independent witnesses and independent information," Leavens said.

Although not limited to sexual assault cases, evidence is important to either corroborate the victim's allegations or prove the suspect's innocence.

"So many (cases) are legitimate, but every once in a while there's one that comes up that isn't true and that hurts the legitimate cases," Leavens said. "But we have an open mind and take them all seriously."

Involving police in the crime early is key, Leavens stressed, not only for preserving evidence, but also for lending credibility if the case goes to trial. The sooner police are notified, the sooner they are also able to catch the suspect in the vicinity of the crime scene.

"The quicker we're involved, the quicker we can make a difference," Leavens said.

He added that several Dearborn officers have received advance training in sex crimes. Officers are trained in special investigative and interview techniques and also stay on top of the latest information, Leavens said.

The department also provides counseling and advocacy services through First Step, an organization dedicated to reducing incidents of domestic and sexual violence while providing services and support to those affected by the crimes.

"At First Step, we try to help (the victims) see that they don't have to go through it alone — that there is help available," said Beth Wittenbrink, a First Step representative serving Dearborn and Dearborn Heights.

First Step provides a variety of support for victims of domestic and sexual violence, including shelter services, a 24-hour help line, information, advocacy and education. In 2004 alone, the organization provided assistance to nearly 17,000 Michigan residents victimized by domestic violence or sexual assault.

"Sexual assault is a devastating attack on a person's body and soul," said Marianne Udow, Department of Human Services director. "Sexual assault is more pervasive than many realize."

Recent studies show 40 percent of Michigan women age 18 and older have experienced some form of sexual violence; however, it is a crime that can affect anyone, regardless of age.

In July 2006, a 14-year-old girl was sexually assaulted outside the Cherry Hill Apartment complex, located near Cherry Hill and Inkster Road in of Dearborn Heights. Her attacker, 19-year-old Chauncey Leemonte Townsend, was sentenced to serve 15 to 30 years in prison for his role in the attack.

The girl — whose name was withheld due to her status as a minor — told police Townsend dragged her to the Cherry Hill complex at about 11:15 p.m. after she met him on her way home from a party in Inkster.

He slammed her head into a brick wall outside an apartment, she later told police, and forced her to remove her pants at knifepoint. When he began to sexually assault her, she fought back.

It was then that Townsend allegedly became irate and used the knife to cut her throat before he left the area on foot.

Fighting for her life, the girl told police she managed to make it to her feet and ran to find help — help she found in a man taking his trash outside.

The man, a resident at the complex, told police he saw the girl — who was still naked from the waist down — running toward him as blood gushed from the wound in her neck. Covering her in a sheet, the man contacted police while he attempted to slow the flow of blood.

Within three minutes, police arrived at the scene and were able to slow the flow of blood from the wound. The girl was transported to Garden City Hospital in Garden City and was later moved to Mott Hospital in Ann Arbor when her condition stabilized.

Townsend was later located south of the apartment complex — with the assistance of Dearborn Police Officer Melissa Krot and K-9 Bruno of the department's K-9 unit — and arrested.

Dearborn Heights Police Capt. Gary Tomkiewicz said surgeons were able to repair most of

the damage to the girl's neck, but the physical and emotional scars left by the attack may never fully heal.

"Sometimes it can be beneficial for a victim just to know that there is somewhere willing to listen — that's why we're here," Wittenbrink said. "If and when they're ready to take the next step, we're here to help."

During April, the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board Executive Director Debi Cain urges people to talk about sexual assault and its impacts. Talking openly about the crime helps raise awareness about the issue, helps survivors feel less alone and conveys the message that help and support are available.

"It's not about sex," Cain said. "It's about the perpetrator gaining power and control over another person. While the majority of sexual assault victims are female, it can happen to anyone regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, race, ability or economic status."

If you or someone you know has been the victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, contact the Dearborn Police Department at (313) 943-2238 or the Dearborn Heights Police Department at (313) 277-6770.

First Step can also be reached 24 hours a day by calling (888) 453-5900 or (734) 453-5900. For more information about First Step, visit www.firststep-mi.org.

Contact News Editor Cristen Kis or Staff Writer Sean Delaney at (313) 359-7820.

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http://www.pressandguide.com/stories/041807/loc_20070418001.shtml



Heating-help program needs infusion of cash

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

By Sarah Kellogg

Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Michigan has run out of money to fund home heating assistance for its poorest residents, more than five months shy of the end of the state budget year.

Unless lawmakers in Lansing or Washington act quickly, the shortage will translate into thousands of low-income families looking at shut-off notices or frigid nights in the coming weeks and months as they lose access to federal and state aid.

"This is an important public safety-net program," said Sharon Parks, a spokeswoman for the Michigan League for Human Services, a research and advocacy group. "Private agencies generally can't provide much of this kind of assistance because it's a big-ticket item. When you're talking utility bills, that can run into the hundreds of dollars at a time, and that's where the state or federal government can help."

The help generally flows through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, which underwrites the cost of heating or cooling homes around the nation. This year, the federal government allocated \$2.1 billion for the program, down from 2006's \$3.2 billion.

A combination of the 2007 reduction and a cold winter finds the state at a crossroads. Beginning Friday, the state will no longer accept applications from low-income families for State Emergency Relief payments. Michigan received \$29 million in federal LIHEAP dollars for direct emergency relief this year compared to \$51 million in 2006.

"This is the earliest we've ever run out (of money)," said Karen Stock, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services, which administers the program. "This is a critical need. We actually have served more clients this year than we did last year by this time. The need is increasing. This is not a good time to run out of funding."

Between Oct. 1 and March 31, the state had served 313,000 low-income clients, spending all of its \$48 million in state and federal emergency energy assistance funding. Last year, the state had served 266,000 people by the same point and spent \$34 million.

The state also is using about \$70 million of its 2007 federal LIHEAP allocation of \$106.7 million to underwrite its home heating tax credit. About 389,000 Michigan households qualify annually for the credit, and taxpayers can apply for the credit through September.

Michigan has had two pots of money to pull from for emergency heating assistance: The federal LIHEAP program and a state fund administered by the Michigan Public Service Commission and financed by utility company contributions.

Stock said the state Legislature could vote to free up about \$14 million in state emergency energy funds held in reserve by the MPSC, but that's the smallest pot. Or Congress could approve up to \$650 million in emergency funding for 2007. Or President Bush could release \$203 million in unspent LIHEAP dollars.

Michigan's utilities, which have worked with the state to protect against shut-off notices, have lobbied Congress to approve additional funds, joining 34 of the nation's governors, including Michigan's Jennifer Granholm, in February in calling for a \$2 billion boost in federal LIHEAP funding for 2007.

"We're in the business to make electricity and deliver natural gas," said Dan Bishop, a spokesman for Consumers Energy. "There's a cost to doing that, regardless of the income level of the customer. Sure, it's an act of compassion on our part (to push for more funding), but it's also practical on our end so we can pay our bills."

But it's unclear whether Washington or Lansing will respond in time to offset the spring cold snap and

summer heat.

"There's certainly very compelling reasons to release the money right now," said Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, a trade group that represents state energy officials. "It would be very timely because a lot of states are where Michigan is right now. It's just not clear if it will happen."

Contact reporter Sarah Kellogg at (202) 383-7810 or e-mail her at skellogg@boothnewspapers.com.

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Heat aid runs out Friday

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

By Chris Gautz

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On Friday, the state will run out of money it provides to low-income households needing emergency energy assistance that in most cases is used as a way to avoid utility shutoffs.

In Jackson County last year, close to 4,000 households were served by the program.

Michigan Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said unless more money is made available at the state or federal level, new applications for energy crisis assistance will be denied due to lack of funds until the new fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

"This is unusual for us to run out this early," she said.

The DHS has provided low-income residents \$45.7 million for crisis assistance since October 2006. About \$1.9 million goes to Michigan families each week.

The money comes from the federal government through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, which was slashed by Congress last year.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, along with more than 30 other governors, in February signed a letter urging Washington to restore the \$1 billion cut from LIHEAP in fiscal year 2007.

Sorbet said President Bush has the authority to release funds to fill the gap in funding.

"To date, he has not done that," Sorbet said.

The Michigan Senate and House adopted nonbinding resolutions urging the funds to be released.

"For many Michigan families, it is a choice of whether to heat or to eat," DHS Director Marianne Udow said in a statement.

"I can only add my voice to the many Michigan leaders, including Governor Granholm, who urged the president to release emergency LIHEAP funds."

In February, President Bush recommended a decrease in LIHEAP funds for 2008 to take core funding down to \$1.478 billion from \$1.98 billion.

In March, U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg, R-Tipton, along with almost 100 other members of Congress, signed a letter to the chairman and ranking member of the budget committee urging them to fully fund the 2008 LIHEAP budget at \$5.1 billion, the full amount authorized.

The letter also requested advanced funding for 2009 to allow states to pre-purchase fuel and start planning for the winter heating season earlier.

Consumers Energy spokesman Dan Bishop said the Jackson-based utility has met with Walberg's staff regarding LIHEAP funding and relayed how important the program is to its customers.

Bishop said if customers have or anticipate a problem paying their bill, they should call the utility at 800-577-5050 as soon as possible.

"We strive to work with customers to ensure they have continued service," he said.

In fiscal year 2006, there were 108,895 Michigan households that received an average payment of \$488 for emergency payments for heat and energy costs.

Funding for LIHEAP was at an all-time high in 2006, according to the Department of Human Services.

Brenda Leonard, community services director for the Community Action Agency, which serves Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties, said Friday's cutoff will have wide-ranging implications.

The Community Action Agency does not have any energy crisis funding available, Leonard said.

When people come to her office, they are sent to the Department of Human Services because it normally has more funds to assist people with. Now, DHS has told Leonard not to send people if they have energy crisis needs because there is no more money.

"It's going to effect the whole community," she said.

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More people relying on food stamps in Michigan

Saginaw County sees larger rise than other areas



[By Jeff Piechowski](#)

SAGINAW COUNTY (WJRT) - (04/03/07)--A new study by the state of Michigan says more and more people in the state are relying on food stamps to feed their families. In fact, one of the areas those numbers have risen the most is in Saginaw County.

That number has increased by 20 percent over the past four years. The main reason involves a weak economy and lack of employment.

"It's partly because people know more about the program, and it's partly because I think there's less stigma," said Saginaw Center for Civil Justice's Terri Stangl.

"It's a program that's now helping working families and seniors and folks with disabilities."

And that stigma is far from accurate. Of all the close to 35,000 people in Saginaw County who receive food stamps, only 14 percent are on welfare.

"You can have several thousand dollars per month for a family of three and still qualify," Stangl said. "Things like a house and a car and a small bank account don't necessarily keep you off the program anymore."

In fact, Stangl says the breakdown in Saginaw County is not what you'd expect.

Although there's still a significant percentage of recipients in the city of Saginaw, the numbers have gone way up in rural areas.

But even with food stamps, many families are having a hard time feeding their families. The value has remained the same and is not keeping pace with rising food prices.

Stangl and others addressed this issue with Sen. Debbie Stabenow Monday in Frankenmuth. They're asking the State Legislature to adjust the food stamp benefits with the cost of living.

It's something that hasn't been done since 1996.

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

Jeanne Phillips: Dear Abby

Welfare hog feeds from government trough

Dear Abby: I am unsure what to do about a friend who I thought was an honest, law-abiding citizen. She bragged to me that she's committing welfare fraud by not revealing additional income.

Abby, she gets free medicine, Section 8 housing and utility bill help among other things, courtesy of the government. In the meantime, she has bought a new car (paying cash), plastic surgery, etc. I never thought she would do something like this.

Should I report her to the authorities? It makes me angry that people who really need these services are denied them while she's on a continuous spending spree. What should I do?

Ticked Off in Topeka, Kan.

Dear Ticked Off: Unless you want to continue subsidizing "her majesty" the welfare queen's continuous spending spree, pick up the phone and report what she's doing. Yes, there are a lot of people who need help; we pay taxes in part to help them -- but your "friend" isn't one of them. She should be made to pay restitution.

Gratiot County Herald-2

<http://gcherald.com/news/local-dhs-board-appointments.shtml>

Local DHS Board appointments

April 12, 2007

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) director Marianne Udow announced today the appointments of 82 county DHS board members for terms expiring October 31, 2009. Gratiot County's Diane K. Chineduh in Ithaca is one of those appointed.

April 12, 2007

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) director Marianne Udow announced today the appointments of 82 county DHS board members for terms expiring October 31, 2009. Gratiot County's Diane K. Chineduh in Ithaca is one of those appointed.

The three-member DHS boards represent communities in an advisory capacity to county agencies. The county board of commissioners appoints two members of each board and the third is appointed by the state DHS director.

Udow said, "County DHS board members play an important role in the successful delivery of financial and other services to residents of Michigan counties."

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Karen Stock (517) 373-7394

Federal government: Michigan increased claims and collections by \$1.8 million from prior year in state's Food Assistance Program

April 18, 2007

The federal government praised Michigan Department of Human Services for its management of the Food Assistance Program that provides nutritional assistance to low-income residents.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), which administers the federal Food Stamp Program, recently congratulated Michigan Department of Human Services for its fiscal year (FY) 2006 performance in claims management – the process of recovering overpayments caused by errors or fraud.

"For the second year in a row, both the number of claims and dollars (recovered)...in FY 2006 increased over the prior year," the FNS said in a report it issued in February. "This is a very significant positive trend... after many years of seriously downward spiraling claims performance in the state."

The report said DHS:

- Increased claims, or requests to return overpayments, from 3,840 in 2005 to 4,459 in 2006.
- Increased the amount to be returned from \$2.6 million in 2005 to more than \$3.5 million in 2006.
- Increased overpayment collections from about \$4.9 million in 2005 to more than \$6.7 million in 2006.

"This shows we are serving the nutritional needs of Michigan citizens and, at the same time, ensuring proper use of taxpayer dollars," said DHS director Marianne Udow. "This is substantial and important improvement for which Department of Human Services field, policy, inspector general and recoupment staff can take pride."

Factors that contributed to this success include:

- DHS recoupment staff devised strategies to increase claims.
- The department established better relationships with all involved in the recoupment process.
- DHS set goals for improvement for FY 2006 and far surpassed its goal.
- The department developed and uses a statewide tracking and recording system that allows county and state staff to monitor performance of units dedicated to recovering overpayments.

Michigan's Food Assistance Program supplements the food purchasing power of low-income individuals and families. The USDA funds 100 percent of program benefits while the state and federal governments share administrative costs. The Department of Human Services determines eligibility for food assistance. In February 2007 there were 551,981 households receiving benefits representing 1,197,856 individuals. The average benefit per person statewide is about \$94 per month.

For more information on food assistance go to www.michigan.gov/foodstamps